“THE AIR WAS BLUE WITH PERJURY”: POLICE LIES AND THE CASE FOR ABOLITION

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Police officers lie. About nearly every aspect of their work and at every stage of the criminal legal process—in arrest paperwork, warrant affidavits, courtroom testimony, and disciplinary proceedings. The primary scholarly account of police perjury frames the problem as one that emerged largely after the Supreme Court decided Mapp v. Ohio, which made the Fourth Amendment exclusionary rule applicable in state criminal proceedings. But a gap exists in the literature, one this Note seeks to fill: Scholars have neglected to consider whether, and to what extent, police lied before Mapp. By reaching into the historical record, this Note uncovers a rich tradition of rank perjury dating back to the origins of modern policing.

Building on the insight that police have lied for as long as police have existed, this Note sketches an abolitionist framework for police perjury. A structural understanding better accounts for the fact that police lies legitimate police power and figure prominently in two other features of modern policing—racialization and violence. In offering a new framework to understand the perjury problem, this Note joins the growing chorus of scholars, organizers, and activists calling for defunding and dismantling the police.

INTRODUCTION ................................................. 2049

I. ABOLITION AND POLICE PERJURY .......................... 2054
   A. Police Abolition ............................................. 2054
      1. Historical ................................................. 2056
      2. Material .................................................... 2059
      3. Ideological .................................................. 2061
   B. Police Perjury ............................................... 2062

II. HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF POLICE PERJURY ............. 2068
   A. Nineteenth-Century Perjury ............................... 2069
   B. Twentieth-Century Pre-Mapp Perjury ..................... 2072
      1. Perjury Connected to Confessions and the Third Degree ............................................... 2073

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December 2021] POLICE LIES AND THE CASE FOR ABOLITION 2049

2. Police Perjury Unrelated to the Third Degree ... 2075

III. POLICE PERJURY AND ABOLITION, REVISITED .......... 2078
   A. Toward a Structural Account of Police Lies .......... 2079
      1. Perjury’s Connection to Violence, Race, and Class .............................................. 2080
      2. Perjury and Police Narratives .................... 2083
   B. Implications of a Structural Account of Perjury ..... 2086

CONCLUSION ................................................... 2093

INTRODUCTION

John McDonald and his wife sat on the stoop outside their Second Avenue apartment building in midtown Manhattan.1 It was late on a Sunday evening and the couple had just finished caring for their sick child. Exhausted, they decided to catch some fresh air. As the two talked quietly, they noticed a police officer walking nearby. For seemingly no reason, Officer Montgomery Ditmars of the Nineteenth Precinct decided to make a “pompous show of authority,” threatening the couple and ordering them back inside.2 Mr. McDonald refused, telling the officer to leave them alone.3 Ditmars drew his heavy club and furiously beat McDonald until he “begged for mercy.”4 He then arrested Mr. and Mrs. McDonald, leaving the couple’s sick child unattended, and charged both with disorderly conduct.5 After a night in jail, the McDonalds were arraigned.6

There was only one problem: Officer Ditmars’s story about the couple’s alleged disorderly conduct couldn’t hold up in court. That morning, hours after the officer’s brutal assault, Mr. McDonald’s face was a “mass of cuts and bruises,” one of his eyes “so swollen as to be completely closed.”7 His clothes were stained with blood.8 Ditmars lied about the McDonalds’ “disorderly conduct” anyway, under oath, prompting the judge to dismiss the charges and excoriate the officer in open court.9 But the McDonalds were not Officer Ditmars’s only victims. He was productive the day before, arresting five others, also for

2 Id.
3 Id.
4 Id.
5 Id.
6 Id.
8 Id.
9 Id.
disorderly conduct. The judge dismissed charges against all five, finding Ditmars’s testimony not credible.

Across the country, in Los Angeles, seventeen-year-old Christopher Silvas Sierra and his friends were drinking outside and celebrating the Fourth of July. Christo, as he was known to friends, started arguing with others over a bottle of liquor. During an argument, one of two men, either Robert Ocana or another known as “Chaparro,” pulled out a gun and shot Christo twice. Five Los Angeles Police Department officers, including William Bost, arrived on the scene thirty minutes later and called an ambulance. Christo, moments before dying, declared Chaparro shot him. Ocana, however, who had previously fought with Christo, was arrested and booked on homicide charges.

Like Officer Ditmars, Officer Bost had a problem: Little of that story—other than the Fourth of July celebration and Ocana’s arrest—was true. In reality, Bost and four other officers arrived at the scene before Christo was shot. They confronted the group of young, Mexican American kids celebrating outside and decided to arrest them for disturbing the peace. Bost punched eighteen-year-old Jesse Lacoma in the nose and ordered him into a police car. Christo, trying to leave the scene, began to “stumble away down the street.” It was Officer Bost, following Christo, who “needlessly” shot and killed the young man. The officers then began spinning their story, starting with the lie that they had arrived on the scene thirty minutes

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10 Id.
11 Id.
13 Id.
15 See Boy Testifies in Killing Case, L.A. TIMES, Sept. 27, 1929, at A2 (noting that Christo died of two gunshot wounds); New Killing Story Told, supra note 14 (discussing a witness’s earlier identification of Chaparro as the shooter); Officer Named in Death Quiz, L.A. TIMES, July 12, 1929, at A2 (discussing Ocana’s arrest after being accused of the shooting).
16 Officer Named in Death Quiz, supra note 15.
18 Officer Named in Death Quiz, supra note 15.
19 Bost Defense Strikes Blow, supra note 17.
21 Some sources report the name as Jesse Lalcoma.
23 Spillane, supra note 12.
after the shooting. After framing Ocana by falsifying arrest paperwork, the officers coerced Christo’s friends into blaming the shooting on Chaparro. At his murder trial, Bost perjured himself by denying that he fired his pistol. Bost’s colleague similarly lied by fabricating the dying statement Christo never made. Three other officers took the stand and said they heard “firecrackers” but no gunshots. Only one was convicted for perjury. After Bost was found guilty of manslaughter and served less than two years, the governor commuted his sentence.

This Note is about police lies, like those told by Officer Ditmars and Officer Bost, along with the countless others police tell. In the last thirty years alone, scandals in America’s biggest police departments—from Boston to New York to Los Angeles to Chicago to Atlanta—unearthed widespread dishonesty and deceit, including cases in which officers lied when filing arrest papers, submitting warrant applications, and testifying in court. The scope of the problem, known as “testilying,” “reportilying,” or simply perjury, is not con-

25 Officer Named in Death Quiz, supra note 15.
26 New Killing Story Told, supra note 14.
28 See Bost Defense Strikes Blow, supra note 17 (noting that one of the principal witnesses for Bost’s defense—a police officer named Edward Romero—testified that he heard Christo “make a dying statement to the effect that a man named Chaparro shot him”).
29 Id.
31 Id.
37 MOLLEN COMMISSION, supra note 33.
fined to large police departments in big cities. Officers in towns like Kenosha, Wisconsin have planted evidence, falsified reports, and lied in court.\(^{39}\) Tulia, Texas recently was rocked by revelations of one officer’s repeated perjury that sent more than thirty people to prison with draconian drug sentences.\(^{40}\) In St. Charles Parish, Louisiana, more than seventy narcotics cases were dismissed after news broke that a single officer lied under oath in a criminal investigation.\(^{41}\) By the time the officer’s routine perjury was uncovered, at least twenty other people already had pleaded guilty in cases involving that officer; none of those cases were overturned.\(^{42}\)

There is a rich body of scholarship documenting the persistence of police perjury and offering solutions to the problem.\(^{43}\) But a gap exists in the literature, one this Note seeks to fill: None of the work to date focuses on the lies told by Officer Ditmars and Officer Bost. John McDonald was beaten and wrongly arrested in 1881. Christo Sierra was murdered in 1929. Yet perjury scholars contend that testilying emerged largely in response to the Supreme Court’s 1961 decision in *Mapp v. Ohio*, which held for the first time that the exclusionary rule—a remedy for Fourth Amendment violations that bars the use of unconstitutionally obtained evidence against a suspect—applied to state level prosecutions.\(^{44}\) Lying, or so their theories go, allowed officers to avoid judicial scrutiny for otherwise unconstitutional conduct and ensure that “criminals” were convicted notwithstanding “procedural” hurdles.\(^{45}\)

This Note complicates the *Mapp*-centered account of police perjury. Data suggest police lies increased after *Mapp*, but the conventional framing tells only part of the story. Reaching into the historical record, this Note uncovers a longstanding tradition of rank perjury dating back to the origins of modern policing.\(^{46}\)

The focus on one type of lying presumably told to evade a specific legal rule encourages an overly legalist response—if only we tinker with Fourth Amendment doctrine or retool institutional incentives to


\(^{40}\) Covey, *supra* note 34, at 1139–42.

\(^{41}\) *Id.* at 1142.

\(^{42}\) *Id.*

\(^{43}\) See infra Section I.B.


\(^{45}\) See infra Section I.B.

\(^{46}\) See infra Part II.
discourage officers from lying, the problem will disappear. Almost two hundred years of testilying suggest that police perjury is less a legal conundrum in need of new rules and instead an enduring feature of policing. By interrupting the *Mapp*-centered narrative, this Note instead situates police perjury within the nascent but growing scholarship on police abolition. In the last several years, after police murdered Rekia Boyd, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Freddie Gray, Tamir Rice, Tanisha Anderson, Laquan McDonald, Korryn Gaines, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Tony McDade, and others, there has been “greater scrutiny [over] how police use violence with legal impunity every day.” After George Floyd’s death, protests across the U.S. spurred newfound interest in defunding, dismantling, or abolishing the police.

Those new to abolition join a tradition of activists, organizers, and scholars who have developed a structural account of policing that explains police violence in its various forms—from beatings to killings to residential segregation to the imposition of devastating fines and fees, all largely inflicted upon Black, brown, and poor communities. The crux of abolition is this: U.S. police play a necessary and critical role in “perpetuat[ing] a system of violence and control designed to maintain [the] status quo, to keep poor people of color and poor people in check.” One central insight of abolitionism is that police violence and law enforcement’s role in constructing a racialized and classed society is not an aberration or something that can be cured. It is fundamental to the project of policing itself.

Until now, police perjury has remained disconnected from the growing academic interest in police abolition. The abolition scholarship focuses on the physical and economic violence that police inflict. Part of that scholarship, and critical to abolition theory, is the historical understanding of policing as an outgrowth of slave patrols in the Antebellum South and control over poor immigrants and people of color in the North. From abolitionist history, contemporary policing


49 See infra Section I.A.

50 Akbar, supra note 47, at 1816 (internal quotations and citations omitted).

51 See infra Section I.A.1.
is understood as a persistent form of structural violence.\textsuperscript{52} And yet, perjury and abolition scholars have paid scant attention to whether perjury shares the same historical roots as police violence and racialization.

Using historical evidence of testifying to reframe the problem as a structural one, this Note aligns our understanding of police perjury with abolitionist accounts of policing.\textsuperscript{53} When officers fabricate evidence, manufacture justifications for arrests and searches, and testify falsely to cover up violence and abuses of power, they demonstrate that perjury, like violence, is a feature of policing, not a bug. Part I sets the stage for the historical discussion by first providing an overview of the abolitionist account of policing and then discussing the perjury literature. Part II offers the first account of testifying focused primarily on marshalling historical evidence of perjury predating \textit{Mapp}. Part III analyzes what the historical evidence of perjury means for our understanding of why police lie, what purpose perjury serves in policing, and how we might evaluate possible reforms.

\section{Abolition and Police Perjury}

The structural account of policing outlined below generates skepticism of the role \textit{Mapp} plays in the story of police perjury. Abolitionist scholars and organizers trace police violence and the racist, gendered, and classist enforcement of the criminal law to the origins of policing itself.\textsuperscript{54} Just like violence is a feature of policing, perhaps perjury, too, is endemic to the police function—not a phenomenon that largely emerged following application of the exclusionary rule to state criminal proceedings. This Part details the abolitionist critique of policing and then surveys the perjury literature to illustrate why tension exists between the two. In doing so, the discussion reveals a need for the historical understanding of police perjury, a void Part II seeks to fill.

\subsection{Police Abolition}

The structural abolitionist critique of policing is oriented around the historical and contemporary connection between policing and violence, racism, and political and economic expropriation. Activists’


\textsuperscript{53} See infra Part III.

\textsuperscript{54} See infra note 71 and accompanying text.
calls to dismantle the police are guided by this structural theory of policing.\footnote{55 See, e.g., Mariame Kaba, Opinion, Yes, We Mean Literally Abolish the Police, N.Y. TIMES (June 12, 2020), https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/12/opinion/sunday/floyd-abolish-defund-police.html.}

Police abolition often accompanies demands to eliminate the broader prison industrial complex (PIC)—or, as the abolitionist organization Critical Resistance describes, “the intersecting interests of government and industry that employ surveillance, policing, the judiciary, and imprisonment as solutions to what the state identifies as social problems (i.e., poverty, homelessness, ‘social deviance,’ political dissent).”\footnote{56 Rachel Herzing & Isaac Ontiveros, Building an International Movement to Abolish the Prison Industrial Complex, CRIM. JUST. MATTERS, June 2011, at 42, 42. PIC abolition has its roots in the movements to abolish slavery. See Dorothy E. Roberts, The Supreme Court 2018 Term—Forward: Abolition Constitutionalism, 133 HARV. L. REV. 1, 7 (2019).} In this view, policing is “a fundamental building block”\footnote{57 Akbar, supra note 47, at 1815–16.} of mass incarceration, the front-end gatekeeper of a carceral system that keeps 2.3 million Americans locked up in prisons and jails,\footnote{58 Wendy Sawyer & Peter Wagner, Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2020, PRISON POL’Y INITIATIVE (Mar. 24, 2020), https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/pie2020.html.} a higher rate than anywhere else in the world.\footnote{59 Peter Wagner & Wendy Sawyer, States of Incarceration: The Global Context 2018, PRISON POL’Y INITIATIVE (June 2018), https://www.prisonpolicy.org/global/2018.html.} Millions more are no longer incarcerated but, due to their criminal record, are denied housing, jobs, licenses, loans, and the opportunity to vote.\footnote{60 E.g., Collateral Consequences, PRISON POL’Y INITIATIVE, https://www.prisonpolicy.org/collateral.html (last visited July 31, 2021); More on Incarceration’s Impact on Kids and Families, VERA INST. JUST.: THE HUM. TOLL OF JAIL, http://humantollofjail.vera.org/the-family-jail-cycle (last visited July 31, 2020) (outlining impact on families of people who are or have been incarcerated). For an example of the daunting and often insurmountable obstacles formerly incarcerated people face when applying for loans, see Kira Lerner, ‘Banks Won’t Even Talk to Us’: Business Owners with a Criminal Record Face an Abundance of Collateral Consequences, ARNOLD VENTURES (July 30, 2021), https://www.arnoldventures.org/stories/banks-wont-even-talk-to-us-business-owners-with-a-criminal-record-face-an-abundance-of-collateral-consequences.} Attention from legal scholars to PIC abolition is not new,\footnote{61 See, e.g., Dorothy E. Roberts, Constructing a Criminal Justice System Free of Racial Bias: An Abolitionist Framework, 39 COLUM. HUM. RTS. L. REV. 261 (2007).} and joins a long tradition among organizers, activists, and scholars of other disciplines focused on abolition theory and practice.\footnote{62 See Akbar, supra note 47, at 1784 n.6 (collecting sources).}

At the same time, activists during the last thirty years have begun fighting for police abolition not just because of policing’s “function within the PIC[,]” but as a system that harms and oppresses in its own right.\footnote{63 See, e.g., Black Liberation and the Abolition of the Prison Industrial Complex: An Interview with Rachel Herzing, 1 PROPTER NOS, no. 1, Fall 2016, at 64; see also Roberts, supra note 61.} There has been renewed attention from scholars to police vio-
lence and criminalization after police shot and killed eighteen-year-old Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri in 2014 and choked and killed twenty-five-year-old Freddie Gray in Baltimore, Maryland in 2015. Earlier scholarship is critical of policing, but the abolitionist critique of policing paired with explicit calls to dismantle the institution marks a new moment.

Professor Amna Akbar, a leading abolition scholar, outlines the abolitionist account of policing. At bottom, the critique illustrates how, “[r]ather than addressing directly the underlying social, economic, and political problems of inequality and maldistribution—unemployment, substandard wages, inadequate health care, evictions, addiction, mental health, and intimate violence—we police and cage the people who struggle through them.” Policing and punishment often are carried out by violent force, but the choice to police as a response to underlying social problems is a form of racialized, classed, and gendered violence as well. This Section utilizes Professor Akbar’s categorization of the historical, material, and ideological dimensions of the abolitionist critique.

1. Historical

To understand policing as a form of racialized violence and a tool of control, abolitionists point to policing’s historical “arc,” which dates to “enslavement, Jim Crow, and settler colonialism.” Scholars outside the abolition tradition locate the roots of modern policing in mid-nineteenth-century police departments in cities like Boston, New York, and Chicago. As this Subsection illuminates, focusing atten-
tion away from the South is ahistorical and neglects the fact that even in the North, policing “evolved in response to . . . race and class contradictions” animated first by anti-immigrant and then anti-Black sentiment.\(^{72}\)

Slave patrols in the Southern colonies were the first publicly funded police forces.\(^{73}\) White people were empowered by law to police enslaved people who ran away, committed criminal acts, or conspired against their owners, and they “patrolled” through unspeakable violence and terror.\(^{74}\) Patrolling was an economic enterprise for patrollers, who often earned salaries or tax breaks for their efforts,\(^{75}\) and for slaveowners, whose “private property[—]Black human beings”—could be controlled.\(^{76}\) The Southern economy thus was sustained through policing.

Following the Civil War, policing in the South transformed from slave patrols to police departments “in name only.”\(^{77}\) Legislatures passed “Black Codes,” criminal laws targeted exclusively at Black people,\(^{78}\) the enforcement of which—through policing—reconstituted
slavery and the slave economy. By policing and then criminalizing formerly enslaved people, the plantation class kept their source of labor: Once Black people were incarcerated, the Thirteenth Amendment’s prohibition on slavery no longer applied because the Amendment permitted servitude for those “duly convicted.”

Violence and terror remained a staple of policing as officers enforced Black Codes and Jim Crow laws. White officers in Memphis in 1866 beat Black people for minor infractions and then raped at least five women and killed forty-six Black people once residents rioted in response. Almost the same occurred months later in New Orleans. In 1881, an Atlanta police commissioner urged his officers to murder Black residents. Police also played a vital role in maintaining the Jim Crow racial order by enforcing formal Jim Crow laws and joining extralegal Ku Klux Klan vigilantes to terrorize, beat, or murder Black people. Local police were instrumental in lynching efforts, either participating directly or facilitating the mob. This police terror continued during the Civil Rights Movement.

80 McLeod, supra note 78, at 1188.
82 Officers beat Black residents and then killed almost fifty after a white mob clashed with Black Orleanians who had gathered to support a state constitutional convention convened to overturn the Black Codes. Id.
83 Inst. for the Study of Lab. & Econ. Crisis, supra note 72, at 26 (“Kill every damned [Black person] you have a row with.”).
85 See, e.g., Equal Just. Initiative, supra note 81, at 47 (noting that a local police captain was among seven white men who were arrested—but never prosecuted—for coordinating an 1891 lynching in Omaha, Nebraska).
86 For example, police arrested, blasted with fire hoses, clubbed, and attacked with dogs the more than 700 Black children protesting the bombing of a church in Birmingham, Alabama in 1963. Id. at 58. Police in Mississippi delivered three civil rights workers “to a white mob after detaining them for an alleged traffic violation.” Id. The mob then attacked and killed all three. Id.
The abolitionist account of policing centers anti-Black efforts in the South to patrol enslaved people and then police Black people, all to maintain a raced, gendered, and classed hierarchy. But even in the North, in police departments that are central to contemporary nonabolitionist accounts of policing, law enforcement remained a story about state-sponsored racism, othering, and violence. In major cities in the North, the precursors to modern police departments were systems of watchmen, which did little to control crime and instead focused on terrorizing poor immigrants, joining forces with “nativist vigilantes” to “break strikes and suppress hunger riots.”

Once formal departments were established, Northern police engaged in union-busting aimed at largely immigrant communities. The othering of immigrant communities outside the South in part coincided with the period in which Black people from the South began migrating North, which prompted the racialization of crime—when “Black” became synonymous with criminal. Consider Philadelphia, where despite the fact that Black residents composed only seven percent of the population, they accounted for a quarter of all arrests in the 1920s, up from eleven percent more than a decade earlier.

Outside the Northeast, Professor Jill Lepore traces modern policing in the American West and Southwest to mobs, vigilantes, and law officers in Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas, and Utah who lynched and killed thousands of Mexican Americans and Mexican and Chinese immigrants.

2. Material

Beyond reckoning with policing’s historical trajectory, abolitionists critique policing’s role in constructing an unequal political and economic order. As the historical account shows, policing originated as a mechanism to maintain a racial caste system, but it also was indispensable in constructing a slave economy in the South and an industrial one in the North. Professor Ruth Wilson Gilmore has traced the rapid construction of prisons in California to overlapping surpluses in

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87 Inst. for the Study of Lab. & Econ. Crisis, supra note 72, at 22.
88 Id. at 26.
89 For an account of The Great Migration, including its effects on the racialization of crime and poverty, see generally Isabel Wilkerson, The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America’s Great Migration (2010).
92 Id.
“land, capital, labor, and state capacity[,]” not rising crime rates.93 Prisons were a natural (although not inevitable) outgrowth of the crises of idle space and unused workers, which were caused in part by a changing industrial landscape and increasingly globalized U.S. economy.94 Once built, prisons needed to be filled—by police, through the enforcement of the criminal law—with people.95 Over time, law enforcement has become a primary point of government contact for poor and working-class people of color through the “criminalization of poverty, mental illness, perceived anti-social behavior, and drug addiction.”96 At the same time that federal, state, and local governments invested billions in funding to build and maintain surveillance and carceral apparatuses for policing and caging millions of people, they divested from social institutions that could have kept people employed, educated, healthy, and housed.97

Due to chronic overinvestments in policing and underinvestment in communities, Professor Akbar highlights the role of police as a “fundamental tool[] for neoliberal state management.”98 Two examples emerged recently in response to the COVID-19 pandemic: First, as part of New York City’s vaccination program, the city deployed officers doubly trained as medics to administer vaccines due to a shortage of healthcare workers.99 Police also are first responders to medical emergencies, mental health crises, interpersonal disputes, and evictions.100 Despite all that police are forced to do and notwithstanding the government’s failure to adequately fund social services, the nonpolice components of police work often are the areas in which


94 Gilmore, supra note 93, at 54–55, 88.


98 Akbar, supra note 47, at 1821.

99 Dean Meminger (@DeanMeminger), Twitter (Jan. 16, 2021, 9:00 PM), https://twitter.com/DeanMeminger/status/1350624073823498244 (reporting for the local news on the vaccination rollout).

100 Akbar, supra note 47, at 1816.
officers get the least training. The second example came in June 2021, when President Biden announced that $350 billion of the COVID-19 stimulus package would be earmarked for local police departments to hire more police officers and implement crime prevention programs, rather than fund further investments in education, infrastructure, or unemployment. The distorted funding for police departments, on top of over-criminalization and our dependency on police to provide a social safety net, generates a stratified economic and social order.

3. Ideological

The final abolitionist critique focuses on the “ideological framework” that justifies and legitimates policing. There is a persistent narrative that “criminalization is for the collective good” and “police are agents of public safety,” which is perpetuated in part by pithy slogans like “law and order,” “tough on crime,” and “Blue Lives Matter”—rhetorical devices that construct police as a necessary and effective function. The dominant conception about policing constructs binaries: On one side are good, law-abiding (white and economically well-off) people who can expect government-funded safety and support, and on the other are bad, lawless (Black, brown, and poor) people whose needs are met with punishment. To maintain this myth, opponents of reform resort to fearmongering and mistruths about crime and safety, a strategy rooted in the “historically potent connection between race, fear, and criminality in the U.S.”

The implications for this critique are central tenets of abolition theory. When houselessness, poverty, drug addiction, and mental health issues are criminalized rather than seen as problems in need of

103 This critique resurfaces later in Part III, *infra*, when analyzing the role of perjury in creating public narratives about the value and necessity of police.
public health solutions, police—who enforce the criminal law—shift blame for harm from the state to the individual.108 Rather than question our failure to guarantee basic needs like food, housing, transportation, a living wage, and healthcare, we criminalize the person who steals bread for theft, the houseless person who urinates in public for disorderly conduct, the turnstile jumper who cannot afford public transportation for fare evasion, and the dealer who sells to support his family for drug distribution. In addition to de-emphasizing the state’s role in creating and then neglecting these material crises, police construct a reality in which “people of color, poor people, and queer and trans people [are cast] as undeserving and unworthy of social benefits.”109 Catching these “criminals” and keeping them in cages is then used as evidence to support the myth that policing works and keeps us safe.110

Professor Akbar's and other structural accounts of policing have been framed as an abolitionist understanding of police violence, which makes sense given the harm police and prisons inflict.111 But scholars also have begun fleshing out what abolitionist principles mean for other aspects of the criminal legal system.112 Similarly, the structural account of policing—including an abolitionist historical perspective—has not been used to evaluate police perjury. Before sketching the longstanding tradition of police perjury, the next Section frames the perjury problem and the existing literature before turning to Part II’s historical analysis.

B. Police Perjury

Police officers lie. About what they saw.113 About whether a “suspect” committed a crime.114 About what a witness or informant told

108 Cf. Akbar, supra note 47, at 1822 (noting that houseless people are criminalized rather than given guaranteed housing).
109 Id. at 1824.
110 See Southerland, supra note 107 (discussing the racist fearmongering tactics used to obstruct criminal justice reform efforts).
111 Akbar, supra note 47, at 1816 (“In abolitionist thinking, policing and incarceration are contingent, rather than necessary, forms of violence . . . .”).
114 E.g., Lionel White, Sr., NAT'L REGISTRY OF EXONERATIONS, https://www.law.umich.edu/special/exoneration/Pages/casedetail.aspx?caseid=5053 (last updated Dec. 7, 2017) (describing how officers manufactured a story about seeing a suspect with heroin, when
them. 115 About whether an informant even exists. 116 About how suspicious they felt when observing someone or how dangerous an encounter felt. 117 About whether a person consented to a search. 118 About the severity of force they inflicted when stopping, frisking, or arresting someone, or whether any force was used at all. 119 About whether someone responded to force by “resisting arrest.” 120 And officers lie at every stage of the criminal legal process—when they fill out paperwork after an incident; 121 when they seek judicial approval for a warrant to search or arrest; 122 when they testify under oath at suppression hearings 123 and trial; 124 and when they are the focus of disciplinary proceedings. 125

That police perjury occurs is not debatable. Officers in New York City themselves developed the word “testilying” to capture several phenomena: “testimonial perjury” (lies before a grand jury or a

instead officers burst into White’s apartment without a warrant, beat and arrested him, searched the place but found no drugs, and charged him with aggravated battery and drug possession); see also Covey, supra note 34, at 1181 (describing police perjury cases in Trulia and Los Angeles in which officers fabricated stories to frame innocent people).

115 E.g., Joseph Goldstein, Promotions, Not Punishments, for Officers Accused of Lying, N.Y. TIMES (Mar. 19, 2018), https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/19/nyregion/new-york-police-perjury-promotions.html (reporting on detective accused of including false information in an affidavit for a search warrant because he “said that his confidential informant had purchased cocaine from people on different floors of the house, which the Police Department later determined was not true”).

116 Commonwealth v. Lewin, 542 N.E.2d 275, 284 (Mass. 1989) (overturning trial judge’s finding that an informant existed as “clearly erroneous”); see also Visser, supra note 36 (discussing an officer who untruthfully swore that a reliable, confidential informant existed).

117 The murder of Laquan McDonald by Chicago officer Jason Van Dyke is tragic but instructive. Van Dyke insisted that McDonald was moving toward police while aggressively swinging a knife, when in fact videos “showed the teenager, who was carrying a three-inch folding knife, appearing to try to walk past a group of officers, veering slightly away from them.” Monica Davey, Officers’ Statements Differ from Video in Death of Laquan McDonald, N.Y. TIMES (Dec. 5, 2015), https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/06/us/officers-statements-differ-from-video-in-death-of-laquan-mccdonald.html?module=inline.

118 E.g., Covey, supra note 34, at 1178–79.


120 E.g., MOLLEN COMMISSION, supra note 33, at 37.

121 E.g., Covey, supra note 34, at 1179–80 (highlighting “dropsy” cases in which officers lie to establish probable cause for searches and seizures as one frequent form of “testilying”).

122 E.g., Visser, supra note 36 (noting officer testimony that Atlanta narcotics officers lied in ninety percent of search warrant applications).


124 E.g., Covey, supra note 34, at 1139–40, 1139 n.32.

125 E.g., Davey, supra note 117.
judge), “documentary perjury” (lies told under oath in an affidavit or criminal complaint), and “falsification of police records” (lies about facts and circumstances in arrest reports). Officers in Boston coined the term “creative writing” for when they falsify police reports. Scholars and commentators have filled pages documenting police perjury’s existence and proposing various solutions.

The primary account of police perjury focuses on the rise of testifying as a backlash to the criminal procedure revolution ushered in by the Warren Court. In *Mapp v. Ohio*, the Court for the first time required state courts to follow the exclusionary rule, which entitles individuals whose Fourth Amendment rights have been violated to keep unconstitutionally obtained evidence out of their criminal trial. From 1914 until *Mapp* was decided, only federal judges were constitutionally obligated to exclude illegally obtained evidence from being admitted at trial. Following *Mapp*, the Court in *Miranda v. Arizona* also required exclusion of evidence after officers failed to

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126. See MOLLEN COMMISSION, supra note 33, at 36. Professor Slobogin uses “reportilying” for fabrication in reports. Slobogin, supra note 38, at 1044. This Note uses “testilying” to capture all three circumstances described in the Mollen Commission report.


128. See, e.g., Slobogin, supra note 38 (describing the nature of testilying and proposing to curtail it by creating a more flexible probable cause standard, punishing officers for lying, and replacing the exclusionary rule with a damages remedy); Covey, supra note 34 (discussing police perjury as a primary cause of wrongful convictions); Gabriel J. Chin & Scott C. Wells, *The “Blue Wall of Silence” as Evidence of Bias and Motive to Lie: A New Approach to Police Perjury*, 59 U. Pitt. L. Rev. 233 (1998) (arguing that officers commit perjury because of the “blue wall of silence,” an unwritten code among police officers that forbids disclosure of misconduct by fellow officers); Vida B. Johnson, *Bias in Blue: Instructing Jurors to Consider the Testimony of Police Officer Witnesses with Caution*, 44 Pepper. L. Rev. 245 (2017) (arguing that juries should be given instructions regarding the biases and interests that testifying officers may have); David N. Dorfman, *Proving the Lie: Litigating Police Credibility*, 26 Am. J. Crim. L. 455 (1998) (arguing that judges should permit robust litigation of police witness credibility, including expanded discovery and cross examination).

129. See Slobogin, supra note 38, at 1040 (focusing on lying to “evade the consequences of the exclusionary rule”); Johnson, supra note 128, at 272–73 (noting that “officer credibility has been an issue for more than fifty years” and tracing the problem to *Mapp*); Covey, supra note 34, at 1176 (finding that testilying occurs “when police lie . . . to ensure that evidence obtained during the encounter is not excluded or excludable”); Steven Zeidman, *From Dropsy to Testilying: Prosecutorial Apathy, Ennui, or Complicity?*, 16 Ohio St. J. Crim. L. 423, 426 (2019) (noting discussions of perjury in New York stem from “dropsy” cases following *Mapp*); Donald A. Dripps, *Police, Plus Perjury, Equals Polygraphy*, 86 J. Crim. L. & Criminology 693, 698 (1996) (beginning his discussion of perjury with *Mapp* and subsequent rise of dropsy testimony).


December 2021] POLICE LIES AND THE CASE FOR ABOLITION 2065

administer prophylactic warnings to suspects before custodial interrogation.\footnote{Miranda v. Arizona, 384 U.S. 436, 444 (1966).}

The exclusionary rule is a focal point for scholars because, in their account, it incentivized police to lie in order to prevent judges from excluding inadmissible evidence against suspects. Former federal prosecutor and New York state judge Irwin Younger first described—and subsequent data confirmed\footnote{Sarah Barlow, Patterns of Arrests for Misdemeanor Narcotics Possession: Manhattan Police Practices 1960-62, 4 CRIM. L. BULL. 549, 555–60 (1968).}—the advent of so-called “dropsy” cases that followed Mapp.\footnote{See Irving Younger, The Perjury Routine, NATION, May 3, 1967 (defining “dropsy” cases).} “Dropsy” cases illustrate why scholars see the exclusionary rule as an underlying cause of police perjury. Pre-Mapp, many state police officers could testify honestly about searches and seizures conducted in violation of the Fourth Amendment, without fear that evidence would be suppressed as the result of constitutional misconduct.\footnote{Id.} But once the exclusionary rule applied, honest testimony required judges to exclude otherwise inculpatory evidence. So officers began recounting a false narrative with stunning frequency: Defendants (fortuitously) “dropped drugs as the police came upon them.”\footnote{Slobogin, supra note 38, at 1041 n.14 (citing Barlow, supra note 133).}

Any subsequent search or seizure was either outside the Fourth Amendment’s protections or reasonable under the Amendment, and evidence recovered was then admissible at trial.\footnote{Younger, supra note 134.} Rather than comply with the law, officers avoided judicial scrutiny by lying—in arrest reports, as part of sworn affidavits seeking search and arrest warrants, and during testimony before grand juries and judges.

In the perjury literature, the relationship between perjury and Mapp is framed as a causal one, but scholars vary in the degree to which they attribute testilying’s historical basis to Mapp. No one states explicitly that perjury began only after Mapp and did not exist before the decision. But some, like Professor Morgan Cloud and Professor Bennett Capers, imply as much.\footnote{Professor Capers notes that “blue lies have existed as long as there have been restraints on police activity[,]” but goes on to suggest that before Mapp, officers had little reason to lie and began doing so once the exclusionary rule applied. I. Bennett Capers, Crime, Legitimacy, and Testilying, 83 Ind. L.J. 835, 868 (2008). Similarly, Professor Cloud points to longstanding evidence of general police corruption, dating back at least to the Wickersham Commission in the 1930s, but traces police perjury itself to the 1960s. See Morgan Cloud, Judges, “Testilying,” and the Constitution, 69 S. Cal. L. Rev. 1341, 1342–43, 1350–53 (1996); see also Morgan Cloud, The Dirty Little Secret, 43 Emory L.J. 1311, 1314–21 (1994) [hereinafter Dirty Little Secret] (“The change in police testimony

\footnote{Miranda v. Arizona, 384 U.S. 436, 444 (1966).} \footnote{Sarah Barlow, Patterns of Arrests for Misdemeanor Narcotics Possession: Manhattan Police Practices 1960-62, 4 CRIM. L. BULL. 549, 555–60 (1968).} \footnote{See Irving Younger, The Perjury Routine, NATION, May 3, 1967 (defining “dropsy” cases).} \footnote{Id.} \footnote{Slobogin, supra note 38, at 1041 n.14 (citing Barlow, supra note 133).} \footnote{Younger, supra note 134.} \footnote{Professor Capers notes that “blue lies have existed as long as there have been restraints on police activity[,]” but goes on to suggest that before Mapp, officers had little reason to lie and began doing so once the exclusionary rule applied. I. Bennett Capers, Crime, Legitimacy, and Testilying, 83 Ind. L.J. 835, 868 (2008). Similarly, Professor Cloud points to longstanding evidence of general police corruption, dating back at least to the Wickersham Commission in the 1930s, but traces police perjury itself to the 1960s. See Morgan Cloud, Judges, “Testilying,” and the Constitution, 69 S. Cal. L. Rev. 1341, 1342–43, 1350–53 (1996); see also Morgan Cloud, The Dirty Little Secret, 43 Emory L.J. 1311, 1314–21 (1994) [hereinafter Dirty Little Secret] (“The change in police testimony
Gabriel Chin and Scott Wells distinguish between two types of lies—those to frame or convict the "innocent," and those to evade the exclusionary rule and convict the "guilty." The latter are more prevalent in their view and stem from *Mapp*. Even for Professor Covey, as well as for Professor Chin and Scott Wells, who focus on other "types" of perjury, *Mapp* figures prominently.

The *Mapp*-centered story of police perjury is intuitively appealing. Two primary explanations exist for why police lie to obscure constitutional violations instead of following the letter of the law. The first is workplace culture. Many officers work in departments that either explicitly or implicitly reward those who make more arrests and do not have evidence from those arrests suppressed later. Lying becomes the path of least resistance to succeeding on the job. In a system that has proven unlikely or unwilling to uncover police mendacity or punish officers who lie, officers face a simple and (in their minds) justifiable choice: lie and increase the odds of a promotion, or, instead, tell the truth and risk allowing constitutional rules requiring suppression of evidence to stand in the way of professional success.

Officers lie to advance professionally all while knowing that their departments routinely promote officers notwithstanding evidence that...
they lie, vouch for known liars to be hired by other departments, and fail to discipline misconduct.

The second reason why the exclusionary rule is said to motivate perjury is simpler, but ultimately more nefarious. Many officers view the exclusionary rule as unacceptable and obstructing their primary purpose of keeping communities “safe.” Excluding evidence that officers believe proves a suspect’s criminality is a procedural barrier or “legal impediment” that stands in the way of their “capacity to deal with criminals.” Any rule that obstructs police from catching murderers, rapists, and other criminals is a design flaw—a “procedural formality”—that must be subverted to attain “justice.” Of course, the exclusionary rule necessarily requires foregoing some “truth” to

143 E.g., Goldstein, supra note 115, at 1 (“One plainclothes officer, Konrad Zakiewicz, was accused by two federal judges of testifying falsely in gun cases in 2013. His career survived. Last year, he was promoted to detective.”).

144 Take, for example, Jonathan Freitag, who was a member of the Fairfax, Virginia police department from 2015 until 2020. Fairfax Letter of ‘Good Standing’ for Ex-Officer Freitag, WASH. POST (Apr. 19, 2021, 11:21 AM), https://www.washingtonpost.com/context/fairfax-letter-of-good-standing-for-ex-officer-freitag/287aa7e1-61b2-41f5-993c-1aa36fa13ec. Freitag was involved in more than 930 cases during his tenure, about 400 of which resulted in convictions. Tom Jackman, Fairfax Seeks to Dismiss 400 Convictions in Cases Brought by One Officer, WASH. POST (Apr. 16, 2021, 5:18 PM), https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2021/04/16/convictions-dismiss-jonathan-freitag-fairfax. Between 2018 and 2019, Freitag was the subject of five internal affairs inquiries, and in July 2019, the Fairfax County Police Department received a tip that Freitag was involved in “multiple acts of misconduct.” Id. After the FBI joined the county’s investigation into Freitag’s conduct, the county prosecutor conducted a random review of forty of Freitag’s traffic stops and found “the basis used by the officer to justify the stop, as memorialized in his police report, was untruthful.” Id. Rather than fire Freitag, the department agreed to give the officer two weeks’ notice so Freitag could resign. Id. Once Freitag resigned, the Fairfax County Police Department provided him with a letter stating that Freitag “resigned . . . in good standing,” had “favorable” employment, and was “eligible for re-hire.” Id. Freitag went on to work at the Brevard County Police Department in Florida until April 2021, when he was fired after the department there learned of Freitag’s misconduct in Fairfax. Id. To date, one felony conviction based on Freitag’s lies has been vacated, after Fairfax prosecutors found that Freitag’s arrest report was entirely fabricated. Tom Jackman, D.C. Firefighter Freed from Prison after Conviction Based on Fairfax County Officer’s False Claims Is Thrown Out, WASH. POST (Apr. 21, 2021, 6:48 PM), https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2021/04/21/dc-firefighter-case-dismissed. Prosecutors are seeking to clear the other 400 convictions obtained based on Freitag’s work. Id.


146 E.g., Slobogin, supra note 38, at 1044 (noting that “[t]he most obvious explanation” for police perjury is officers’ “desire to see the guilty brought to ‘justice[,]’ a goal that officers feel is thwarted by a legal system that lets suspects “escape conviction simply because of a ‘technical violation’”).

147 Jerome H. Skolnick, Deception by Police, 1 CRIM. JUST. ETHICS 40, 43 (1982).

148 Slobogin, supra note 38, at 1044.
deter misconduct. But judges, not police, are tasked with striking the proper balance and officers are expected to follow judicial decisions. Officers who lie to evade the exclusionary rule subordinate the rule of law in favor of what the Supreme Court has called the “competitive enterprise of ferreting out crime.”

But focusing on Mapp distorts our understanding of perjury, its role in the project of policing, and what solutions are worth pursuing. Until now, scholars have neglected to consider any pre-Mapp perjury or merely nodded to a long tradition of police corruption without considering perjury’s role in that history. Yet abolitionist critiques of policing uncover the deep roots and enduring presence of police violence, prompting the question of whether police lies share similar features. The rest of this Note explores that possibility and its implications.

II

HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF POLICE PERJURY

This Part develops a historical account of pre-Mapp police perjury. Central to the abolitionist critique is the reckoning of modern policing with its roots in slavery, Jim Crow laws, and racial and anti-immigrant violence. In the perjury literature, however, scant attention is paid to whether—as well as to what extent and to what end—police lied before Mapp. And, in the abolition literature, the focus remains primarily on police violence, meaning legal scholars of aboli-

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149 Scholars have engaged in a robust debate about the merits of the exclusionary rule. E.g., Christopher Slobogin, Why Liberals Should Chuck the Exclusionary Rule, 1999 U. ILL. L. REV. 363 (1999); see also id. at 365 n.2 (collecting scholarship in favor of the rule); id. at 367 n.3 (collecting scholarship containing proposed alternatives to the rule). Some justify their opposition to the rule, in part, by pointing to what the system “loses” in terms of “truth” by excluding evidence—not unlike an officer’s potential justification for perjury in the first instance. See, e.g., Akhil Reed Amar, Fourth Amendment First Principles, 107 HARV. L. REV. 757, 785–800 (1994) (arguing that courts could better “affirm their integrity and fairness” by not “closing their eyes to truthful evidence”). This debate has unfolded as the Court has dramatically changed the exclusionary rule doctrine by whittling away its protections and creating and expanding exceptions to the rule. See generally Tracey Maclin, The Supreme Court and the Fourth Amendment’s Exclusionary Rule (2013).

150 Johnson v. United States, 333 U.S. 10, 14 (1948); see also Tracey L. Meares, Synthesizing Narratives of Policing and Making a Case for Policing as a Public Good, 63 ST. LOUIS U. L.J. 553, 554–58 (2019) (discussing how police effectiveness at fighting crime and police lawfulness are often viewed as in tension with one another).


152 See supra note 138 and accompanying text.

153 See supra Section I.A.1.

154 See supra Section I.B. In one paragraph, Professor Dorfman nods to the idea that testifying predated Mapp. However, all of the sources he cites do not substantiate that
tion have yet to focus on perjury as a part of the police function. The following discussion aims to fill these gaps. Much of this evidence, which uncovers instances of perjury dating back to the 1840s, comes from newspaper reports or commissions instituted to investigate police corruption. Relatively few judicial decisions discussing police perjury are available before *Mapp*. The lack of case law, however, belies the rich tradition of police perjury dating back to the beginnings of modern policing.

### A. Nineteenth-Century Perjury

Cases involving wanton beating, like Officer Ditmars’s treatment of John McDonald—brutality followed by manufactured charges of disorderly conduct and then perjury in court to justify the beating—were routine less than three decades after the New York City Police Department (NYPD) was established. Another case from 1874 unfolded in similar fashion. A driver complied with Officer John Russell’s request to get inside his car; while entering, the driver made a “good-humored” comment to Russell, which prompted Russell to beat the man “unmercifully” with a whip, leaving him half-blind. Officer Russell then arrested the man for disorderly conduct. In court, the officer provided an “elaborate description” of the man’s supposedly unlawful behavior. Justice Wandell discredited Russell’s account after a third party testified to what actually occurred, contradicting the officer’s lies. A third case from 1880 involved an officer fabricating testimony about an assault to justify bludgeoning two young men and arresting them for disorderly conduct—after which three of the officer’s colleagues bolstered the lie with their own
fabricated (and increasingly fantastical) testimony—before the judge found the entire charade to be false, credited a bystander’s contradictory account, and dismissed the charges.¹⁶²

Some of the earliest documented occurrences of police perjury were in New York City, although testifying emerged in places like Rhode Island¹⁶³ and Atlanta¹⁶⁴ as well. In many cases, perjury was connected with police violence, like that suffered by John McDonald and others, as officers manufactured charges to justify clubbing and beating people on city streets. Hundreds of press accounts of police violence spanned the late nineteenth century, with complaints dating back to 1846, the NYPD’s “first full year of operation.”¹⁶⁵ After they fabricated charges, “officers stuck together and corroborated each other’s testimony” in criminal and disciplinary proceedings.¹⁶⁶ Indeed, decades later, a prosecutor in the Manhattan District Attorney’s office publicly wrote that the NYPD was a “stolid and compact organization for perjury as an offensive and defensive measure.”¹⁶⁷ Around the same time, the police commissioner told a squad at police headquarters that “[y]ou and I know that it is the tradition of this force to hang together and to give testimony in one another’s favor, no matter what the facts are.”¹⁶⁸

¹⁶³ In 1895, a judge ordered the state’s Attorney General to charge two officers with perjury after they arrested a man for carrying a concealed weapon and testified that the man was armed and assaulted one of the officers—when, in fact, one officer placed the billy club inside the arrestee’s pocket “so as to get a case” and then aided the second officer in making the arrest. Charge of Police Perjury, BOS. DAILY GLOBE, May 23, 1895, at 7; see also Providence Police Scandal, BOS. DAILY GLOBE, Oct. 28, 1895, at 1.
¹⁶⁴ Less than thirty years after the Atlanta Police Department was established, journalists uncovered a practice of employing informants who fabricated testimony against local restaurant owners for illegally selling alcohol. E.g., Perjury Warrant for Stool Pigeon, ATLANTA CONST., June 6, 1900, at 10. Other officers were accused of framing an innocent man for robbing someone in Atlanta when the suspect was in a small town more than fifty miles outside the city while the incident occurred. Will Prosecute Them for Perjury: James Pittard After Witnesses Who Testified Against Him, ATLANTA CONST., July 8, 1900, at 6.
¹⁶⁵ JOHNSON, supra note 1, at 12, 15.
¹⁶⁶ Id. at 30, 91.
¹⁶⁸ W. A. Purrington, The Frequency of Perjury, 8 COLUM. L. REV. 67, 77 (1908). The former deputy police commissioner for New York City agreed, saying “one must not marvel when he reads in the daily press of policemen committing perjury in the courts.” Clement J. Driscoll, The New York Police Situation, 2 NAT'L MUN. REV. 401, 406 (1913). Later cases elsewhere demonstrate officers’ willingness to lie in support of their colleagues. E.g., Cop to Die for Girl Slaying, CHI. DEF., Apr. 12, 1930, at 1 (describing one officer charged with perjury for lying under oath to bolster another officer’s defense that he was too drunk to know he shot and killed a fourteen-year-old Black girl after she resisted his
In 1894, the New York State Legislature convened proceedings, eventually known as the Lexow Committee, to investigate widespread corruption in the NYPD. The committee was not tasked with investigating perjury, and scholars who discuss the Lexow Committee as a historical moment in the evolution of modern policing have largely noted the investigation’s focus on organized corruption. But testimony from the months-long investigation also yields evidence of perjury among officers, thus confirming journalists’ contemporary accounts of police lies.

To start, officers who testified under oath lied to the commission about allegations of bribery and corruption. When one state senator on the committee asked an officer why “policemen come to the stand and swear falsely,” an officer responded, “[w]e stand by each other.” Prosecutors also brought before the committee scores of NYPD officers who had clubbed and beat New Yorkers. Frank Moss, Associate Counsel to the Committee, however, acknowledged to Chairman Clarence Lexow that he “brought only the convicted cases” in which officers were proven to have terrorized people by violence. In addition, there were “volumes of cases” resulting in acquittals “because of the combined testimony of the police officers.” Chairman Lexow responded that “[t]he air was blue with perjury.” Moss, along with the city’s police commissioner himself, agreed with Lexow’s conclusion about the scope of perjury and its use to cover up wrongdoing once officers were accused of brutality.

That perjury was a problem among NYPD officers at the department’s inception perhaps should be unsurprising. Contemporary accounts of modern policing typically identify London’s department, established in 1839, as the model followed in New York and Boston. But London had its own perjury problem. In the late nineteenth century, police there lied in a “systematic way,” leading journalists to...
report that the “reported cases [of perjury] are as one in a score of the occasions in which a protest might with justice be made.”

178 Officers felt compelled to “exaggerate if not . . . invent” as well as “bolster each other’s evidence, regardless of the truth.”

179 One magistrate “estimated that [half] of all summary cases, and [two-thirds] of those arising out of night time incidents, depended entirely on uncorroborated police evidence.”

180 Like disorderly conduct charges contrived by NYPD officers, “drunkenness” was a popular “catch-all provision” in London.

B. Twentieth-Century Pre-Mapp Perjury

While press clippings and the Lexow Commission proceedings provide insight into perjury’s roots dating back to the origins of modern policing, a systemic account of pre-Mapp perjury emerges from investigative records compiled by President Hoover’s National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement (the Wickersham Commission). Established in 1929 as the first national body to study the U.S. criminal justice system, the Commission generated most public attention for its failure to recommend repeal of Prohibition.

However, investigators also documented widespread use of “the third degree”—or “the use of physical brutality, or other forms of cruelty, to obtain involuntary confessions”—which culminated in the Report on Lawlessness in Law Enforcement.

Although that report focused on third-degree tactics and proposed reforms, Commission staff uncovered substantial evidence of police perjury, some connected to brutal interrogation strategies and other, entirely unrelated.
lies. The following account of police perjury is anchored around the Commission’s investigative reports and supplemented with other contemporaneous evidence.

1. Perjury Connected to Confessions and the Third Degree

According to Ernest Hopkins, special investigator for the Wickersham Commission, perjury and third-degree tactics were intertwined because “police must be ready to support [a] confession in case of serious challenge to its validity.” And so, police officers covering up torture or brutality levied to coerce confessions would recount fanciful, often unrealistic stories to explain how defendants became bruised and bloody: “The defendant fell downstairs while we were bringing him down for questioning.”

Scholars have devoted considerable attention to third-degree techniques and the police’s eventual turn from physically coercive tactics to psychologically-oriented ones, a shift that was prompted in part by the Court’s decision in Brown v. Mississippi. See, e.g., Stephen J. Schulhofer, *Reconsidering Miranda*, 54 U. Chi. L. Rev. 435, 437 (1987). Scholars also have focused on how Miranda, while forbidding “psychological threats,” still permits “psychological manipulation,” largely neutralizing the effect of the Miranda warnings. See, e.g., Eric J. Miller, *Encountering Resistance: Contesting Policing and Procedural Justice*, 2016 U. Chi. Legal F. 295, 319–20, 331 (2016). Some scholars reference perjury as part of the third degree. E.g., Charles T. McCormick, *Some Problems and Developments in the Admissibility of Confessions*, 24 Tex. L. Rev. 239, 250 (1946) (“[A]n officer who is willing to use methods which he knows are unlawful is frequently . . . willing to deny the wrong under oath. The end justifies the perjury if it justifies the brutality.”). Yet, the incidence of perjury relating to the third degree—not to mention the Commission’s uncovering of unrelated perjury—has not been the focus of the police perjury literature.

The Wickersham Commission’s final report was published in 1931, two years after the investigation was established. United States Wickersham Commission Records, Harv. L. Sch. Libr.: Hollis for Archival Discovery, https://hollisarchives.lib.harvard.edu/repositories/5/resources/6474/collection_organization#tree::resource_6474 (last visited July 28, 2021). Commission members and field investigators compiled more than 7,000 items, including “correspondence, memoranda, minutes of meetings, transcripts, press releases, notes, financial statements, form letters, briefs and reports, drafts and outlines of reports, news clippings, and printed items.” Id. For my research, I accessed the Commission’s papers and investigative reports from ProQuest’s History Vault. ProQuest History Vault, ProQuest, https://congressional.proquest.com/historyvault (search “Wickersham Commission”) (last visited July 28, 2021). To uncover documented instances of police perjury, I began by reading through the Commission’s summary reports about law enforcement in major U.S. cities, many of which were written by Ernest Jerome Hopkins, one of the Commission’s field investigators. Says Police Give Boys Third Degree, N.Y. Times, Nov. 13, 1931, at 14. I also read Hopkins’s reports following interviews he conducted with judges, journalists, police officers, and others. Further, I read through many of the bibliographies and press clippings compiled by investigators, which offer contemporary reporting on police perjury and misconduct.
derly in his cell, and his cell-mates beat him up.”\footnote{Id.} “The defendant rolled off a bench in his cell and bruised himself on the concrete floor[\textendash]”\footnote{Id.}—even though the bench was “only a few inches high.”\footnote{Id.}

The use of perjury to cover up the third degree was not a secret. Wickersham investigators pointed to a book by Ernest Southerland Bates, which included a letter from a former district attorney in New York: The prosecutor admitted “[d]etectives often take the witness stand and commit perjury in order that confessions can be justified. Members of the Police Department do not consider this as unjustified.”\footnote{Bibliography Readings, \textit{in} Wickersham Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement, Committee on Official Lawlessness: Black Americans and Class Prejudice, ProQuest History Vault, Folder 001966-009-0387.} Across the river in Newark, New Jersey, the Commission’s report suggests widespread perjury by police—and acquiescence by judges—relating to confessions obtained by the third degree. Court-house reporter Robert Thompson told Wickersham investigators that allegations of beatings were frequent.\footnote{Interview with Robert Thompson (Jan. 5, 1930), \textit{in} Wickersham Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement, Committee on Official Lawlessness: Ernest Hopkins Interviews on Official Lawlessness, ProQuest History Vault, Folder 001966-011-0467 (noting police “used very severe methods including violence, sleeplessness, lack of food, threats,” and more).}

In Newark, however, courts routinely brushed aside these claims or found that police and detective claims to the contrary “adequately refuted” allegations of the third degree.\footnote{Id.} Based on an interview with Robert Thompson, the Commission described an “attitude of support” from judges who credited officer testimony that no physical brutality occurred, “even where a man was marked by bruises when he appeared in court.”\footnote{Id.} During another interview about so-called “Jersey Justice,” a local legal scholar noted that police (and judges and prosecutors) “laugh[ed] in their sleeves” whenever defendants alleged abuse or duress.\footnote{Interview with Harold H. Fisher (Jan. 5, 1931), \textit{in} Wickersham Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement, Committee on Official Lawlessness: Ernest Hopkins Interviews on Official Lawlessness, ProQuest History Vault, Folder 001966-011-0467.}

Similar problems emerged elsewhere. Judge Dan Cull from Cleveland, Ohio believed the third degree was constantly used by Cleveland police, and that officials who denied the tactics

\footnote{While the Newark report does not outright allege officer perjury, and instead focuses on judicial acquiescence in the third degree, it nonetheless documents actual beating and brutality, followed by officer denials of that very fact—at minimum raising the specter of perjury.}
December 2021 | POLICE LIES AND THE CASE FOR ABOLITION | 2075

were lying. Judge Cull noted that juries in his courtroom suspected police of lying, leading them to “distrust the police on all possible occasions” and return a “high percentage of acquittals.”

While perjury related to the third degree plagued Northern cities like New York, Newark, and Cleveland, the practice was widespread in the South as well. Local law enforcement beat Black men, who often were arrested and charged for crimes they did not commit, in order to elicit confessions—before lying about torture at trial where Black defendants stood little chance of acquittal before all-white juries. Not only would officers lie about the brutality, they also would double down and deny brutality in the few cases when judges credited allegations of the third degree, thus committing perjury on top of perjury.

2. Police Perjury Unrelated to the Third Degree

A significant amount of perjury documented by the Commission was unrelated to brutal interrogation techniques. Often, perjury was used to cover up routine property destruction and violence. For example, investigators collected news reports from Detroit identifying a police officer who admitted to perjuring himself by “denying that he and two patrolmen wrecked furnishings” in a man’s home when making a prohibition raid. The Commission’s report indicates that in Seattle, officers widely constructed false arrest narratives about encounters with suspects to sanitize brutality. Detectives rarely resorted to using the third degree there—once a suspect is “arrested,

196 Interview with Judge Dan B. Cull (Nov. 12, 1930), in Wickersham Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement, Committee on Official Lawlessness: Ernest Hopkins Interviews on Official Lawlessness, ProQuest History Vault, Folder 001966-011-0699.
197 Id.
198 For a comprehensive account of one example, the Groveland Boys case, see King, supra note 84. While telling the story of four young Black men falsely accused of, and then beaten to confess to, raping a white woman, King recounts similar cases across the Jim Crow South. E.g., id. at 53 (describing facts of Lyons v. Oklahoma, 322 U.S. 596 (1944), and then-attorney Thurgood Marshall’s work on the case).
199 See, e.g., Third Degree Applied by Montgomery Police, ATLANTA CONST., Nov. 23, 1910, at 3 (describing an officer charged with perjury after he denied, under oath at a motion for a new trial, disclosures of third-degree tactics).
200 Police Officer May Face Perjury Charges in Raid, DETENTION FREE PRESS (Nov. 14, 1930), in Wickersham Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement, Committee on Official Lawlessness: Prohibition Cippings, ProQuest History Vault, Folder 001966-008-0740.
201 See Summary of Seattle (Dec. 20, 1930), in Wickersham Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement, Committee on Official Lawlessness: Ernest Hopkins Interviews on Official Lawlessness, ProQuest History Vault, Folder 001966-011-0602 (describing how police claim that suspects resisted arrest and needed to be subdued in order to cover up beatings).
booked and in his cell, he seems fairly safe”\textsuperscript{202}—but lawlessness instead flourished on the streets. Officers beat suspects in booking rooms or hit them upon arrest or in patrol wagons, manufacturing stories afterward to shroud their behavior in the “color of legality” by claiming “that the man resisted arrest and had to be subdued.”\textsuperscript{203} In South Carolina, after a Black man argued with a Greyhound bus driver about using a bathroom during a stop, police dragged the man off the bus, beat him in a nearby alley—leaving him blind for life—and manufactured disorderly conduct charges.\textsuperscript{204}

In Boston, investigators found relatively less reliance on third-degree tactics.\textsuperscript{205} The Commission documented some judicial complacency toward perjury associated with brutal interrogation tactics.\textsuperscript{206} But the Boston report uncovers abuse and misconduct in other areas of detective practice: unlawfully entering into people’s homes and assaulting suspects in patrol wagons and at station houses.\textsuperscript{207} With respect to these abuses, the Commission found “perjury and ‘formula testimony’ exists to a considerable degree.”\textsuperscript{208} Widespread perjury in Boston—alongside other corruption and abuse—surprised investigators because, unlike in other cities, officers at the time were individually liable for fines and judgments “when convicted or sued for unlawfulness.”\textsuperscript{209}

The Commission also interviewed Harvard Law School Professor John Burns, who specialized in criminal procedure and studied courts in the Boston area.\textsuperscript{210} Professor Burns emphasized that officers had “worked out” before coming to court “just what evidence the given judge would require in order to convict”—and provided that evidence “whether it were strictly true or not.”\textsuperscript{211} Officers “corroborate[d] one another from a certain esprit de corps.”\textsuperscript{212} As one example, Burns underscored a troubling practice among Boston police—one worth

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{202} Id.
\item \textsuperscript{203} Id.
\item \textsuperscript{204} \textit{KING, supra} note 84, at 121.
\item \textsuperscript{205} Summary of Bos. 1 (Jan. 29, 1931), \textit{in} Wickersham Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement, Committee on Official Lawlessness: Ernest Hopkins Interviews on Official Lawlessness, ProQuest History Vault, Folder 001966-011-0342.
\item \textsuperscript{206} Id. at 4.
\item \textsuperscript{207} Id. at 4–5.
\item \textsuperscript{208} Id. at 4.
\item \textsuperscript{209} Id. at 5.
\item \textsuperscript{210} Interview with John Burns, in Bos. Mass. 1 (Jan. 26, 1931), \textit{in} Wickersham Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement, Committee on Official Lawlessness: Ernest Hopkins Interviews on Official Lawlessness, ProQuest History Vault, Folder 001966-011-0342 [hereinafter Interview with John Burns].
\item \textsuperscript{211} Id. at 2.
\item \textsuperscript{212} Id.
\end{itemize}
highlighting given the dropsy narrative following Mapp.\footnote{See supra notes 134–37 and accompanying text.} In drunk-driving cases, he observed that in case after case, officers recounted a scripted set of facts in which “defendant’s eyes were glassy, his speech thick, his breath had the odor of liquor, etc.”\footnote{Interview with John Burns, supra note 210, at 2.} Trials then became “formula affairs,” unmoored from truth.\footnote{Id.}

Elsewhere, perjury was targeted along dimensions of gender, race, and class. In New York, NYPD officers falsely arrested and accused poor women of being prostitutes. Vice Squad officers were convicted in 1930 and 1931 after alleging and testifying “by unmitigated perjury” that women were engaged in prostitution.\footnote{HOPKINS, supra note 187, at 278.} In all, twenty-seven women were sent to prison with sentences ranging from five days to three years.\footnote{Women Say Vice Squad Beat, Robbed Them; Spy Identifies 27 Officers, N.Y. A M. (Dec. 4, 1930), in Wickersham Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement, Committee on Official Lawlessness: Entrapment Clippings, ProQuest History Vault, Folder 001966-002-0169.} The NYPD at the time spent $100,000 a year just in Manhattan and the Bronx on informants who would entrap women as part of a “‘framing’ operation.”\footnote{Id. Frame-ups occurred in other contexts. A New York City police commissioner fired an officer for falsely testifying that he saw a man commit burglary, asking a fellow officer to corroborate this account, and later confessing to perjury. Purrington, supra note 168, at 77. Washington, D.C. prosecutors dropped more than twenty cases after it surfaced that undercover agents fabricated liquor purchases they swore they made. Perjury Kills 20 Prohi Cases, ATLANTA CONST., July 20, 1927, at 20.}

Investigators found that in Washington, D.C., with traffic accidents between white and Black drivers, “the police often manufacture[d] evidence against Negroes when they were not even present at the accident.”\footnote{Material on Discrimination Against Negroes by Police and Appeals to Race Prejudice in Trials, from the Chapter by Ira De A. Reid in Miss Mary van Kleek’s Report on Work and Law Observance 140, in Wickersham Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement, Committee on Official Lawlessness: Black Americans and Class Prejudice, ProQuest History Vault, Folder 001966-009-0387 [hereinafter Material on Discrimination].} A Chicago defense attorney recounted how police there fabricated “disorderly conduct” or other “stock charges” against poor Black Chicagoans “for no other reason than because their skins are dark.”\footnote{Roy C. Woods Flays Cops for Making False Arrests, CHI. DEF., Nov. 28, 1925, at 11.} The 1929 murder of Christo Sierra, a young Mexican American teenager, by an officer in Los Angeles prompted a cascade of perjury—first arrest paperwork falsified to frame Sierra’s teenage friend for murder, then lies in court.\footnote{See supra notes 15–31 and accompanying text.}
Other cases illustrated widespread perjury in the Jim Crow South. Recounting police lawlessness directed at Black people, the Commission reports suggest officers in the South lied about facts to make out more serious offenses when faced with allegations that a Black man assaulted a white woman: “There is a tendency on the part of the police to make every simple assault or attempted simple assault on a white woman by a Negro an assault with intent to rape unless the surrounding circumstances would make such a charge utterly ridiculous.”222 A related thread of perjury stems from unfounded accusations that Black men raped white women, which led to scores of innocent-but-framed men killed by lynching or state-sanctioned executions.223

Together, these Wickersham Commission documents and contemporaneous reporting, along with evidence dating police perjury to the mid-1800s, demand we reconsider the conventional narrative of how and why police perjury emerged. Police lies were a feature of policing well-before the exclusionary rule was incorporated against the states in \textit{Mapp}. Officers lied to justify wanton and needless violence, to evade judicial scrutiny for torturous interrogation tactics, to facilitate arrests by formulaic testimony, and to cover up for corruption. The next Part examines the implications of this historical record and the way forward.

III
POLICE PERJURY AND ABOLITION, REVISITED

What insights does the historical record yield about our understanding of police lies and about the \textit{Mapp}-centered scholarly account? What path should scholars, practitioners, and activists chart in response to longstanding police perjury? The following discussion seeks to answer those questions, first by drawing on the historical record and the continuities between historical and contemporary perjury to develop a structural and abolitionist account of police lies. Then, this Part addresses the consequences of the structural account—both for our understanding of how we can and should confront police perjury and for the broader abolition debate.

222 Material on Discrimination, \textit{supra} note 219, at 141.
223 King, \textit{supra} note 84, at 50–53, 152; see also, e.g., Samuel R. Gross, Maurice Possley & Klara Stephens, National Registry of Exonerations, Race and Wrongful Convictions in the United States 13 (2017), https://www.law.umich.edu/special/exoneration/Documents/Race_and_Wrongful_Convictions.pdf (noting case of Stanley Wrice, who was wrongfully convicted of raping a white woman as a result of a confession coerced through torture and was sentenced to life in prison before his eventual exoneration).
December 2021] POLICE LIES AND THE CASE FOR ABOLITION 2079

A. Toward a Structural Account of Police Lies

The historical account above enriches our understanding of police perjury and policing generally. Based on the historical evidence, this Note follows the lead of recent abolitionist literature, which recasts policing in light of abolitionist history and policing’s role in constructing a racialized and classed society. In doing so, this Section abandons the Mapp-centered, legalist account that predominates the perjury scholarship. Instead, it suggests that a structural, abolitionist critique of perjury better captures the lineage of testifying and the role—both historically and today—that perjury plays in policing.

This critique starts from the simple but undeniable proposition drawn from the historical record: Police have lied for as long as police have existed. In the first full year the NYPD operated, New Yorkers filed scores of brutality complaints against law enforcement, and within years, the local press reported on how perjury was a defining feature in many of those cases. Cities like Boston, Seattle, Newark, and Washington, D.C. were breeding grounds for perjury not long after those departments were established. Police in the Jim Crow South lied to subordinate and control Black people. To the extent that any contemporary account of perjury either explicitly or implicitly denies a pre-Mapp tradition of perjury, it is ahistorical.

Perjury by police remained a hallmark characteristic of policing over time, despite progressive reforms born out of the Lexow Committee, Wickersham Commission, and similar investigations—as well as developments in police practices and the broader movement to professionalize police forces. The pre-Mapp record of widespread perjury demonstrates a diversity in the types of lies police told and in the utility of those lies for police. This history is powerful evidence that lying is endemic to the policing function—a feature, not a bug. Testifying thus has persisted, impervious to changes in law and culture and practice, much like two more robustly documented features of American policing: racialization and violence.

The historical evidence supports a departure from the contemporary focus on police lies told to avoid suppression of evidence. That

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224 See generally Akbar, supra note 47; Roberts, supra note 56; Alexandra Natapoff, Atwater and the Misdemeanor Carceral State, 133 HARV. L. REV. F. 147 (2020).
225 See supra Section I.B.
226 See supra notes 157–76 and accompanying text.
227 See supra Section II.B.2.
228 See supra notes 222–23 and accompanying text.
230 See supra Part II.
perspective understands police perjury largely as a response to the exclusionary rule growing out of the Court’s decision in *Mapp* in 1961. Given the deeply rooted tradition of dishonesty, the scholarship misses the forest for the trees. However, departing from the *Mapp*-focused narrative of testifying does not discount police perjury to evade the exclusionary rule. If anything, the historical evidence predating *Mapp* bolsters the notion that police would lie to evade any legal rule. But using the longer arc of perjury to frame testifying as a systemic phenomenon reorients the problem: Lying to avoid *Mapp*’s consequence was not a divergence from a general practice of honesty but instead the outgrowth of what police have always done. Lies told to evade suppression of evidence are part of a larger project of police dishonesty.

Drawing on lessons from the historical record and the ways that record connects to contemporary perjury, I begin briefly sketching what a structural account of the prevalence of police perjury might entail. Two elements of testifying stand out: perjury’s connection to police violence and to racialized and classed policing, and perjury’s role in constructing broader narratives about policing as a legitimate and necessary function. This framework reveals why truth is incompatible with policing—because policing is synonymous with racialized and classed violence and control, and because lying allows police to whitewash those features and sell a sanitized narrative about “safety” and “crime” to judges, lawyers, and a complacent public.

1. **Perjury’s Connection to Violence, Race, and Class**

   The historical and contemporary records forcefully underscore the connection between police perjury and police violence. Whether in cases involving the third degree, or others in which police wantonly brutalized people but not to elicit confessions, perjury dating back to the mid-nineteenth century allowed police to downplay or justify force to satisfy legal requirements or avoid public backlash. The role of police lies in violent police encounters persists today, with officers routinely tacking on charges like assault and battery or resisting arrest to whitewash the use of force. Still, in other instances, often those involving deadly force, perjury comes not in the form of manu-

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231 See supra Section I.B.
232 See supra Part II.
233 See Lionel White, Sr., supra note 114.
234 See Stern, supra note 119.
factured criminal charges but the false narrative from police about how threatening a person appeared.\textsuperscript{235}

But the connection between perjury and violence transcends those cases in which police inflate a suspect’s threatening demeanor to justify shooting them or manufacture claims that suspects resisted arrest to shield violence from legal sanction. In 2016, police made more than 10.6 million arrests.\textsuperscript{236} Professor Barry Friedman roughly estimates that state and local police conduct more than eight million searches annually “of pedestrians and automobiles alone.”\textsuperscript{237} In the \textit{Mapp}-focused police perjury framing, scholars view officers’ lies as geared toward ensuring that the fruits of those arrests and searches are admissible in court.\textsuperscript{238}

Testifying, even in suppression hearings, does more than evade application of the exclusionary rule. Officers arrest first and justify later—by claiming a person consented to questioning and being searched, or by manufacturing circumstances that made someone appear suspicious, or by lying to say evidence discovered post-arrest was in plain view.\textsuperscript{239} That lie, almost always successful, validates the officer’s decision to stop, search, frisk, and arrest in the next case. The millions of stops, searches, frisks, and arrests that police conduct every year, many predicated on lies, are violent and degrading in their own right.\textsuperscript{240} Thus even in cases that \textit{Mapp}-focused scholars foreground, involving lies so that drugs or guns or other physical evidence won’t be suppressed, perjury whitewashes the violence that accompanies routine policing.

The fact that perjury also is deployed along dimensions of race and class is perhaps unsurprising. Insofar as perjury is connected to violence, police inflict violence overwhelmingly on Black, brown, and poor people.\textsuperscript{241} The historical and contemporary evidence of perjury demonstrates the connection. For police clubbings in nineteenth-century New York, which journalists reported and police themselves

\textsuperscript{235} The murders by police of Laquan McDonald and George Floyd, for example, were followed by lies surrounding how threatened the cops felt—lies that were dispelled once video footage was made publicly available. See Davey, \textit{supra} note 117.

\textsuperscript{236} \textit{Arrest}, VERAY INST. JUSt., https://arresttrends.vera.org/arrests (last visited Aug. 28, 2021).

\textsuperscript{237} \textit{Friedman}, \textit{supra} note 71, at 7.

\textsuperscript{238} \textit{See supra} Section I.B.

\textsuperscript{239} \textit{See supra} notes 113–25 and accompanying text. For a discussion of lies related to consent, see Covey, \textit{supra} note 34, at 1178–79.

\textsuperscript{240} \textit{See Mariame Kaba, We Do This 'Til We Free Us: Abolitionist Organizing and Transforming Justice} 6–12 (2021) (describing the routine violence and indignity that accompany routine interactions with police); \textit{see also} \textit{Friedman}, \textit{supra} note 71, at 7–11 (describing routine force like pepper spray, tasers, and body cavity searches).

\textsuperscript{241} \textit{See Akbar, \textit{supra} note 47, at 1797–99.
conceded was accompanied by perjury, brutality was concentrated in poor neighborhoods where “immigrant and nonwhite residents had little power to resist.” Perjury associated with the third degree was racialized, too. While officers beat and tortured white suspects to elicit confessions, brutality followed by perjury was a key feature of confessions obtained against Black men in the South, often for fabricated charges of rape or murder involving white women.

The same relationship between perjury, violence, and race is clear today. Even absent violence, law enforcement officers predominantly target Black, brown, and poor communities as those in need of policing. Mathematically then, it seems uncontroversial to conclude that perjury arises more frequently in cases involving Black, brown, and poor people. However, we might suspect that even with these disparities, perjury disproportionately emanates from police interactions with Black, brown, and poor people. Perjury scholars focusing on the role of the exclusionary rule implicitly make this point, although perjury’s connection to race is rarely mentioned, let alone foregrounded, in their work. The preoccupation with dropsy cases and so-called “procedural perjury” in suppression hearings underscores the connection between race and police perjury. Even though suppression hearings are relatively rare, they are most frequently held in cases where guns or drugs are the evidence someone is seeking to suppress. Drug and gun cases are overwhelmingly infected by racial disparities. Combined with the racialization of police violence, this sug-

242 Johnson, supra note 1, at 6–7.
243 See generally King, supra note 84; see also, e.g., id. at 152 (noting the coerced confessions of young Black men threatened with lynching in a case known as “Little Scottsboro”).
244 Not a single example of contemporary perjury cited in this Note involves a white suspect.
245 See, e.g., Friedman, supra note 71, at 12 (“Of course we’d be lying to ourselves if we do not recognize that policing often falls hardest on racial minorities, on the lower classes.”). An analysis of arrest data in eight hundred jurisdictions revealed that Black people “were arrested at a rate five times higher than white people in 2018.” Pierre Thomas, John Kelly & Tonya Simpson, ABC News Analysis of Police Arrests Nationwide Reveals Stark Racial Disparity, ABC News (June 11, 2020, 5:04 AM), https://abcnews.go.com/US/abc-news-analysis-police-arrests-nationwide-reveals-stark/story?id=71188546. In 250 of those jurisdictions, Black people were ten times more likely to be arrested. Id. The data exclude police departments in Florida, Illinois, and New York City. Id.
246 See, e.g., Slobogin, supra note 38 (neglecting to mention race); Dirty Little Secret, supra note 138 (same); Dorfman, supra note 128 (same). But see Johnson, supra note 128; Capers, supra note 138.
ggests police lies overwhelmingly are told when the ultimate victim of the lie is a person of color.

2. Perjury and Police Narratives

Perjury often appears inextricably linked to two fundamental and odious features of policing—racialized and classed violence and control. But a structural account of perjury demands we ask what role perjury plays in empowering and legitimizing police. Why is perjury so proximate to whitewashing the violent and discriminatory enforcement of criminal laws? Police lies in arrest reports, court testimony, and disciplinary proceedings exist within a broader information ecosystem—one in which officers, police unions, legislators, activists, organizers, and the public fight over what policing means and what purpose police serve. Properly understood, perjury is one part of that struggle over competing narratives. Perjury is at the core of the “big lie” that “the discretionary despotism of policing necessarily protects and serves the people.”249 This Subsection argues that perjury, as one necessary component of a police public relations strategy, legitimizes policing by reinforcing the notion that police keep us safe and creating conditions that justify further police control.

Recall that abolitionists counter the “ideological framework that is central to police power and legitimacy: that criminalization is for the collective good, and police are agents of public safety.”250 Legitimacy theory suggests that in order to police—that is, enforce criminal law by threat and use of violence—officers require some measure of authority or power.251 By and large, that legitimacy does not come from poor Black and brown people who are policing’s primary targets.252 Instead, scholars, policymakers, practitioners, and officers justify policing within one of two frames. First is whether police are


250 Akbar, supra note 47, at 1823.

251 Professor Monica Bell describes how legitimacy theorists nevertheless misunderstand the relationship between police and poor, Black communities. Monica C. Bell, Police Reform and the Dismantling of Legal Estrangement, 126 Yale L.J. 2054 (2017); see also Russell K. Robinson, Perceptual Segregation, 108 Colum. L. Rev. 1093 (2008) (showing how victims of discrimination perceive and define discrimination differently than those who are unaffected).

252 Bell, supra note 251, at 2085–86 (describing “legal estrangement,” the concept that regardless of perceptions of legitimacy, targeted communities “are nonetheless structurally ostracized”).
“lawful.” Second, and the one advanced primarily by police themselves, is whether officers are “effective” at fighting crime and keeping communities safe. Perjury is a key component of both.

Perjury most obviously functions to disclaim illegality. That much is the concern of the \textit{Mapp}-centered account of testilying. Nearly all the lies, historical and contemporary, are a story—told to judges, prosecutors, and juries—that some investigative work, interrogation, or other activity comported with the rule of law, Fourth Amendment or otherwise. Unsurprisingly, the perjury becomes part and parcel of police culture: For example, the Department of Justice’s investigation into the Baltimore Police Department found that a supervisor emailed officers a fill-in-the-blank template for arrest paperwork that turned blatantly unconstitutional trespassing arrests into ones furnished by probable cause. But disputes over whether police act lawfully unfold outside of courts and police departments, too. While this Note has focused on police lies made while under oath or subject to professional and legal sanctions, officers also lie repeatedly in the court of public opinion.

For example, lies to the press preceded lies in departmental paperwork after Officer Van Dyke of the Chicago Police Department shot Laquan McDonald sixteen times and killed him. As reporters converged on the scene, a spokesman for the Fraternal Order of Police, the officers’ union, described McDonald’s threatening behavior and the need for force—an account that was flatly contradicted by video evidence from the incident. An official Chicago Police Department statement advanced similar lies. It was only when a court ordered the Department to release video footage that the false narrative was disproven in mainstream reporting. McDonald’s death offers only one example. Police officers carefully spin a narrative to the press about how lawfully they behave. Any-

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{253}} Meares, \textit{supra} note 150, at 554.
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{254}} Id.
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{255}} U.S. DEP’T OF JUST., CIVIL RIGHTS DIV., INVESTIGATION OF THE BALTIMORE CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT 37–38 (Aug. 10, 2016), https://www.justice.gov/crt/file/883296/download. In the template, the supervisor left blank spaces for line officers to fill in identifying details of a suspect—except the template was pre-loaded to say the officers “observed a Black male[,]” perhaps giving away how the department envisioned enforcing trespassing statutes. \textit{Id.}
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{257}} \textit{Id.}
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{258}} \textit{See also infra} notes 277–82 and accompanying text.
thing that threatens their public image becomes an existential crisis for police and their monopoly on social control.259

Beyond portraying to the public and to the legal system that policing is lawful, perjury also allows officers to proclaim that police are ferreting out crime and keeping communities safe, and that the world would be dangerous without their protection.260 Perjury further the central ideology of policing,261 and becomes a tool police use to justify continued investments in surveillance and policing apparatuses while states and municipalities struggle to fund social, health, and educational programs.262 Nearly every major police department publicizes statistics about their accomplishments.263 Several official NYPD Twitter accounts comprise a stream of tweets boasting about purportedly illegal firearms officers recovered or how officers keep the city safe.264 In court, lies about how these guns or other evidence were recovered communicate to judges and juries that policing is

259 Schrader, supra note 249. For example, in New York, a coalition of police unions is bitterly fighting, but so far losing, to avoid the release of hundreds of thousands of disciplinary records to the public—records that detail perjury complaints, among other abuses. See Benjamin Weiser, Police Unions Lose Bid to Keep Disciplinary Records a Secret, N.Y. TIMES (Feb. 16, 2021), https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/16/nyregion/nypd-discipline-records-ruling.html. Similarly, more than half of Buffalo, New York’s riot control team quit after two officers were disciplined for violently shoving an elderly man near a protest and then lying about it. See infra notes 277–82 and accompanying text. Elsewhere, the media has depicted a crisis among police departments as officers have quit in response to criticism following the George Floyd Protests. Neil MacFarquhar, Why Police Have Been Quitting in Drovess in the Last Year, N.Y. TIMES (June 24, 2021), https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/24/us/police-resignations-protests-asheville.html. The true scale of these resignations is disputed, with some officers rejoining the same departments in different capacities or moving to other departments. Melissa Gira Grant, The Damning Truth Behind Cop “Walkout” Stories, NEW REPUBLIC (June 30, 2021), https://newrepublic.com/article/162875/damning-truth-behind-cop-walkout-stories. Rather than departments under siege, the narrative reinforces the notion that policing comes at a steep price: “If you want police protection, you are expected to protect the police from protest.” Id.

260 Schrader, supra note 249.

261 See Meares, supra note 150, at 554; see also supra notes 103–10 and accompanying text.

262 Akbar, supra note 47, at 1820.


264 E.g., @NYPDSpecialOps, TWITTER (Mar. 7, 2021, 1:19 PM), https://twitter.com/NYPDSpecialops/status/136827401924689932 (describing execution of a search warrant and firearms discovered in closet by #GoodBoy canine Rico); @NYPDnews, TWITTER (Mar. 5, 2021, 6:50 PM), https://twitter.com/NYPDnews/status/136798592665724930 (describing arrests of anti-police protestors, including for “assaults on police officers”). For a discussion of the role of perjury in cases involving guns and allegations of charges like assault of a police officer or resisting arrest, see supra notes 233–48 and accompanying text.
working as police claim it should. Lies disclaiming violence or racialized and classed enforcement communicate that policing is effective and at little cost. Whether in courtrooms or public statements, the police enjoy a tremendous windfall from lying: Lies mollify much of the dominant class, many whose daily lives remain untouched by police presence (let alone violence), so that police misconduct, profiling, and brutality are kept out of the mainstream until another killing, like George Floyd’s, makes it difficult to ignore.

Perjury therefore plays an indispensable role, along with lies to the press and public, in how police craft their image, one that portrays officers as the exclusive, lawful, and effective provider of public safety. All the while, real people—predominantly Black, brown, and poor ones—are victimized by testilying. When articulating harms caused by police perjury, some scholars lament diminished “trust in government” or weakened “effectiveness” of law enforcement due to reduced credibility. This devalues the indignity and physical and emotional harm to people who become ensnared in the criminal legal system as the result of police lies. Even in a case with airtight proof of guilt, and even when an officer lies to circumvent perceived procedural hurdles like the exclusionary rule, his perjury has an expressive function. It tells the person whose liberty is on the line, and whose life may be forever changed by the carceral system and its consequences, that the law’s promise of justice and its guarantee of equal treatment do not protect her.

B. Implications of a Structural Account of Perjury

By this point in the Note, a patient but perceptive reader might ask, “So what?” Scholars have offered a range of solutions to fix police perjury. Even if the historical record enriches our understanding of testilying and a structural lens more adequately accounts for the problem, why not just pick from their proposals? This Section explains why that approach is impossible as a descriptive matter and unappealing as a normative one.

265 For a critical account of how police testimony is framed for jurors in a way that obscures perjury, see Johnson, supra note 128.
266 John Duda, Towards the Horizon of Abolition: A Conversation with Mariame Kaba, NEXT SYS. PROJECT (Nov. 9, 2017), https://thenextsystem.org/learn/stories/towards-horizon-abolition-conversation-mariame-kaba (“The other thing about prisons and police is how they make people—the vast majority of people—feel secure. I don’t mean safe, I mean secure. Secure means that the scary, awful, monster people are kept at bay by those institutions.”).
267 Slobogin, supra note 38, at 1039.
268 See supra note 60 and accompanying text.
269 Cf. Bell, supra note 251 (describing legal estrangement theory).
The existing literature disaggregates perjury into different types—substantive as opposed to procedural, perjury to convict the innocent versus perjury to convict the guilty. In doing so, and by focusing almost exclusively on the procedural type, scholars approach the problem as a primarily legal one in need of a legal solution. By tinkering with Fourth Amendment doctrine or retooling the incentives that encourage police to lie through some additional oversight, the problem will disappear, so they argue.

But if perjury is a structural problem—a feature of policing as it has existed in the United States for nearly two centuries, coextensive with racialized and classed violence—the practice demands a structural solution. We can discard the notion that perjury constitutes a “bad apples” problem, something only certain officers do in discrete cases. Instead, lying has become “part of a systemic pattern of official violence.” We must be more imaginative in identifying the path forward and more critical of “reformist reforms.”

270 Professor Slobogin proposes altering the level of cause required under the Fourth Amendment to stop suspects. Slobogin, supra note 38, at 1057. Professor Cloud would narrow and rigorously enforce exceptions to the Fourth Amendment’s warrant requirement. Dirty Little Secret, supra note 138, at 1346. Elsewhere, Professor Slobogin advocates for eliminating the exclusionary rule. Christopher Slobogin, supra note 149. Professor Wilson argues that the exclusionary rule should be strengthened to fully deter wrongdoing. Melanie D. Wilson, An Exclusionary Rule for Police Lies, 47 AM. CRIM. L. REV. 1 (2010).

271 Professor Zeidman wants prosecutors to refuse charging when they believe police lied. Zeidman, supra note 129. Professor Capers would have prosecutors pursue criminal charges against cops who lie. Capers, supra note 138, at 874–75. Professor Dorfman advances a litigation approach, with greater discovery relating to past misconduct and a fuller opportunity to cross officers. Dorfman, supra note 128, at 463–64. Professor Dripps would subject officers to polygraph tests. Dripps, supra note 129. Professor Chin and Scott Wells would allow expert testimony on the “code of silence.” Chin & Wells, supra note 128.

272 Roberts, supra note 61, at 278. The “bad apples” retort is often posed in response to police violence, but scholars have rejected that argument. See, e.g., Friedman, supra note 71, at 11 (“One wishes [police violence] could be attributed solely to bad apples, but incidents like these are all too common.”); Cynthia Lee, Reforming the Law on Police Use of Deadly Force: De-Escalation, Preseizure Conduct, and Imperfect Self-Defense, 2018 U. ILL. L. REV. 629, 636 (“This is not a matter of just a few ‘bad apples’ misbehaving . . . .”). A related argument is advanced in response to the progressive prosecution movement, which seeks to address the role of prosecutors in mass incarceration by electing reforming liberal prosecutors in the place of “bad apples.” See generally Note, The Paradox of “Progressive Prosecution,” 132 HARV. L. REV. 748 (2018) (describing the risks associated with depending on prosecutors as catalysts for criminal justice reform, including the inability of progressive prosecutors to initiate transformative change).

273 “Reformist reforms” aim to solve policing’s problems but ultimately legitimize and further entrench policing. Akbar, supra note 47, at 1802–14 (critiquing several recurring reformist reforms: more democracy, bureaucracy, procedural justice, and tools and technology); cf. Note, supra note 272, at 750–56 (describing prosecutorial efforts to “reform through discretion,” including nonenforcement, diverted enforcement, and calls for police accountability).
resisted every recent reform effort to date, leading some reformists to embrace abolition, including a member of President Obama’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing.

Officers themselves have demonstrated their abject refusal to listen to new rules, and the consequence, as Professor Sekhon describes, is that they cannot be “contained by [law].” For example, two Buffalo Police Department officers in June 2020 responded to peaceful protests against police brutality by slamming a seventy-five-year-old man to the ground as he walked alone in an empty plaza nearby. Dozens of the officers’ colleagues calmly walked by as “blood poured out of [the man’s] ear.” To the press and public, police claimed the man “was injured when he tripped and fell.” Once video of the incident went viral, disproving the lie, the city suspended both officers. In response, fifty-seven officers quit—the

274 The long line of police commissions, dating back to the Lexow Committee in New York City, has failed to bring about reform. Kaba, supra note 55 (“These commissions didn’t stop the violence; they just served as a kind of counterinsurgent function each time police violence led to protests. . . . The philosophy undergirding these reforms is that more rules will mean less violence. But police officers break rules all the time.”). So too have the slate of Department of Justice investigations, reform agreements, and binding consent decrees. See ALEX S. VITALE, THE END OF POLICING 20–22 (2017) (noting that federal investigations and prosecutions are “rare,” that local police are “often reluctant to cooperate” or refuse to comply, and that “[e]ven when cases end in voluntary agreements or court-imposed consent decrees, the results are rarely significant or long-lasting”); Paul Butler, The System Is Working the Way It Is Supposed to: The Limits of Criminal Justice Reform, 104 GEO. L.J. 1419, 1461 (2016) (arguing that “federal investigations work, some of the time, to reduce police violence and to improve community perceptions about the police[,]” but that they often have only short-term benefits and do not “do the work of transformation”). But see Stephen Rushin, Federal Enforcement of Police Reform, 82 FORDHAN L. REV. 3189, 3216–17, 3240 (2014) (noting several studies finding positive results following consent decrees but still identifying “numerous possible problems” with DOJ enforcement).


276 Sekhon, supra note 71, at 1711.


278 Id.

279 Id.

POLICE LIES AND THE CASE FOR ABOLITION

December 2021

The police union responded: “These guys did nothing [wrong] . . . . This is disgusting.” What faith can the public have that police would react to reforms aimed at perjury any differently than they have responded to protests against, and reforms aimed at, violence?

To solve the problem of police perjury, policing should be abolished. No amount of money or reform will fix the underlying problem: that lying is endemic to policing. Indeed, the tradition of dishonesty dating back to the origins of modern policing compel that conclusion. So, too, does the unique way that perjury often overlaps with law enforcement’s control over and violence against Black, brown, and poor communities. Although the project of police and PIC abolition looks to dismantle policing as it currently exists, scholars and activists recognize the need to create and structure a world in which the conditions that create the need for policing are obsolete. As Professor Vincent Southerland notes, “a sudden disintegration of America’s criminal legal system is not possible.” Until then, an abolitionist approach to perjury should embrace measures that “decrease the power, footprint, and legitimacy of police.” While detailed policy prescriptions are outside the scope of this Note, the following principles serve as helpful guideposts.

First, reformers should resist measures that invest more money in policing or further legitimize police in the eyes of the public or the law. Ultimately, such reforms entrench police power and frustrate the long-term project of dismantling the policing function. Proposals to conduct polygraph tests before officers testify, demands to equip officers with body-worn cameras, and calls for additional officer training siphon scarce resources that could be used to “build[] alternative modes of responding to collective needs and interpersonal harms” and instead invest in an institution that has proven incapable of fundamental change. Policymakers should be diverting resources away from the police.

281 Kindy et al., supra note 280.
282 Id.
283 Mariame Kaba has said that “[f]or me prison abolition is two things: It’s the complete and utter dismantling of prison and policing and surveillance as they currently exist within our culture. And it’s also the building up of new ways of intersecting and new ways of relating with each other.” Meares, supra note 275.
285 Akbar, supra note 47, at 1825.
286 Id.
287 For example, Austin, Texas recently reallocated funds from the police and purchased a hotel to provide sixty units of “permanent supportive housing for people experiencing chronic homelessness.” Meg O’Connor, Austin Will Use Money Cut from Police Budget to...
And second, creating lasting change by prompting judges and prosecutors to resolve the perjury problem is a fool’s errand. For one, judges and prosecutors have proven woefully inadequate at curbing police perjury for nearly two centuries. The perjury scholarship itself identifies institutional pressures that make prosecutors and judges ill-suited to identify and condemn perjury—like the symbiotic police-prosecutor relationship necessary for prosecutors to bring charges, or the disinclination among judges to call police liars. Judicial deference to an officer’s version of the facts is part of a longstanding and pervasive practice. And while the promise of “progressive prosecution” has captivated reformists, the prospect of wholesale change in the profession, leading to serious decreases in perjury, is unlikely. San Francisco District Attorney and “progressive prosecutor” Chesa Boudin won acclaim last year when he announced a “do not call” list; the prosecutor’s office will “no longer file charges in cases that rely solely on testimony from [officers]” with a history of misconduct, including dishonesty. Despite the fanfare, deep skepticism is warranted: Scholars and public defenders quickly noted that the policy allows “clean” officers to put their names on arrest paperwork and conceal a “dirty” officer’s involvement, part of the routine “code of silence.”

Instead, abolition demands that we simultaneously work to defund and dismantle policing, create systems of accountability for police who lie, and repair the historical and ongoing harm that police lies create—and that we do so without legitimizing or investing in policing. As for accountability, there should be community-controlled entities that are vested with authority to investigate perjury claims, fire officers found to have lied, study which police practices produce perjury, and impose binding policies and priorities on police depart-

__Establish Supportive Housing, Appeal (Jan. 27, 2021), https://theappeal.org/austin-cut-police-budget-supportive-housing-homelessness.\__

\[288\] Zeidman, supra note 129, at 429 & n.43.


\[290\] See Lvovsky, supra note 229 (examining the practice, beginning in the mid-twentieth century, of courts embracing “expert” knowledge from police); Anna Lvovsky, Rethinking Police Expertise, 131 Yale L.J. (forthcoming) (discouraging deference to expert policing in order to provide for greater scrutiny of police behavior and protect individual rights); see also supra note 194 and accompanying text.

\[291\] See Note, supra note 272, at 756–68 (describing institutional disincentives and political hurdles that prevent progressive prosecution from leading to meaningful reform).


\[293\] Stern, supra note 119.

\[294\] Chin & Wells, supra note 128.
December 2021] POLICE LIES AND THE CASE FOR ABOLITION 2091

ments.295 Officers should pay out of their own pockets for settlements and judgements stemming from perjury and other misconduct violations documented by community accountability bodies.296

A pair of new police reform laws in Colorado, which commentators hailed as “[g]roundbreaking,”297 illustrate the perils of “reformist reforms” and provide a helpful comparison to abolitionist approaches of withdrawing power from police departments. One of the laws, passed in 2019, empowers a state review board to revoke the certification of any officer found to have “made an untruthful statement concerning a material fact or knowingly omitted a material fact” in arrest paperwork, while testifying under oath, or during disciplinary proceedings.298

Since the law took effect, only six officers—none from Denver and only three officers total from Colorado’s ten largest municipalities—have lost their certification.299 Part of the problem stems from how the law was written: it relies on police departments to notify the state review board of any lies, based on internal administrative processes.300 But we know that police are loath to expose their colleagues’ lies: the “code of silence,” which the Department of Justice concedes is widespread,301 describes this type of perjury.302 Just one reform cost Colorado taxpayers thousands of dollars for additional training and support,303 all the while legitimizing policing by creating the perception that still-certified officers are honest. Demands for accountability should instead be met with community-based authority


302 Chin & Wells, supra note 128.

303 See 2019 Colo. Sess. Laws 2425 (appropriating $40,056 to the department of law for training board support and peace officers standards).
to impose change on the police.304 And new community bodies should primarily comprise people from groups disproportionately targeted by police, and their views should be centered in the process.305

Empowering communities to hold police accountable for perjury is one forward-looking step to repair the harm that police lying creates. Jurisdictions also should find ways to offer reparations to communities harmed by police perjury. Abolition requires a reckoning with our past, along with affirmative steps to “repair histories of harm.”306 In 2015, advocates successfully demanded $5.5 million in reparations from the City of Chicago for victims of programmatic torture inflicted on primarily poor Black and brown Chicagoans by a former Chicago Police Commander and his department between 1972 and 1991.307 Policymakers should identify victims of police perjury or their descendants, and make amends for the lasting harm police lies have caused to individuals and communities. If those efforts are infeasible, police perjury should be a distinct and quantifiable harm included in broader reparations initiatives.

Ultimately, abolitionist solutions to perjury may not target perjury at all. We can reduce the incidence of testifying by reducing the power and footprint of the police, which is a necessary step toward the long-term goal of abolition. Professor Barry Friedman, for example, has called for “disaggregating the policing function.”308 Police perjury emerges frequently in cases involving street-level encounters between people and the police. If jurisdictions prohibit police from responding in certain circumstances, it becomes impossible for them to lie. Instead of the police, communities can create and empower new community service providers to respond to harm, so long as those services do not replicate the control and violence perpetrated by police.309 Although disaggregating the police function is a short-term solution

304 See Simonson, supra note 295, at 813–14 (outlining push for community control of policing among local activists).
305 Id. at 815.
308 Friedman, supra note 101, at 933, 954.
309 See, e.g., Akbar, supra note 47, at 1834–37 (describing community-based projects); see also Beth E. Richie & Kayla M. Martensen, Resisting Carcerality, Embracing Abolition: Implications for Feminist Social Work Practice, 35 J. Women & Soc. Work 12, 14 (2020) (arguing that without fundamental changes to social work practice, sending social workers into communities rather than police will recreate harm).
that tracks the abolitionist critique, it cannot replace the long-term vision: a world in which education, housing, and health care generate safe and healthy communities, and cooperation and mutual aid supplant violent modes of surveillance and control—a world in which there are no police to lie.310

CONCLUSION

Scholars to consider police perjury frame the problem as one emerging largely after the Supreme Court made the exclusionary rule mandatory in state criminal proceedings. That narrative suggests that lies told after *Mapp* were a departure from a tradition of honesty. But the historical record tells a different story: Police officers lie, and they have for as long as police have existed in the United States. Several consequences flow from that simple truth. First, rather than a largely legal problem, perjury should be understood as endemic to modern policing. By viewing perjury as a structural problem, we better understand police lies and their connection to violence and to the raced, gendered, and classed social order that policing constructs. More than a tactic to evade scrutiny in the courtroom, the lies are necessary to sustain policing as it currently exists. Further, as a structural problem—one that has persisted for almost two centuries and proven immune to reform—police perjury demands a structural solution. Rather than fiddle with legal rules, those concerned with police perjury should embrace what organizers, activists, and abolition scholars have already concluded: Policing, perjury included, works exactly as intended. The institution is incompatible with truth and must be abolished. Spared of the resources and energy we dedicate to surveillance, control, and punishment, we can create a “different society, built on cooperation instead of individualism, on mutual aid instead of self-preservation.”311

310 *See* Kaba, *supra* note 55 (describing how abolitionism is premised on the provision of basic needs and resources by the government).

311 *Id.*